DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 229 758 CS 207 477

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TITLE James Britton and John Keats: An Examination of the Theory and Practice of Composition.
PUB DATE [80]
NOTE 24p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cognitive Processes; *Creative Writing; Models; *Schematic Studies; Theories; *Writing (Composition); *Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS *Britton (James); *Keats (John)

ABSTRACT

John Keats provides a convincing and helpful model of James Britton's philosophy and research on composition. While, contrary to Britton's paradigm, much of Keats's work is simultaneously in the expressive, transactional and poetic modes, early poems are primarily expressive: they record his perception of reality as filtered through his senses and represent his working out of important ideas. As the development of the concept "negative capability" suggests, during Keats's middle period he shifted his focus from himself to his subject and audience. Concerned with persuading, in this transactional mode he developed his craftsmanship by emulating the structures and techniques of great masters such as Shakespeare. He also continued to refine his own philosophy and aims. Finally, in the poetic function, embodied in the great odes, Keats achieved a genuine originality in structure and content. In moving from the participant's to the spectator's perspective, Keats gave his philosophical insights the conviction of enduring truths. Throughout his brief career, as his letters, works, and the subsequent critical analysis of his poetry show, Keats's writing procedure clearly parallels Britton's steps of preparation, incubation and articulation. (MM)

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JAMES BRITTON AND JOHN KEATS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF COMPOSITION

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CS 207 477

One deficiency that persists in current scholarship concerned with analyzing and explaining the composing process is the lack of specific professional models relating theory to practice. In assembling evidence connecting the cognitive and expressive processes of language, researchers have pointed the way to a clearer understanding between thinking and writing. Their efforts have stimulated renewed interest in the ways in which professional authors approach the task of writing, but a serious gap still remains between current composing theory and the presentation of meaning ful models whose writing processes have been examined systematically within a theoretical framework. The English Romantic poet John Keats offers a pertinent example applicable to this area of study.

To a large extent, the stages of Keats' development as a writer closely parallel those cited by James Britton as being expressive, transactional, and poetic; and his composing processes illustrate Britton's steps of preparation, incubation, and articulation. In addition, Keats adopts both roles of the writer that Britton classifies as that of the participant and the spectator.

Several characteristics of Keats qualify him for a study of this type. In the first place, the poet's active writing career was unusually brief. For a short period of three and a half years, as M. R. Ridley notes in Keats' Craftsmanship (1933), Keats' "creative poetic life developed with startling rapidity from a blundering apprenticeship into a very finished craftsman[ship]; and as Ridley further notes, "for the last eighteen months of that period he left . . . evidence which enables us to study his methods and watch his development with unusual

precision."[1] In the second place, Keats wrote a considerable number of letters which express his developing esthetic philosophy and delineate his modus operandi. Concurrent with Keats' relatively late blooming as an artist, he had an uncomplicated philosophy of poetry which is expressed throughout the body of his works. In addition, careful studies exist which describe his stylistic development. Keats, then, offers a rare opportunity for a study of the composing processes of a major writer--a study that has important implications for current efforts to understand and document the ways in which writing is generated and developed. A review of Britton's theory provides a background for placing Keats within its framework.

In Language and Learning (1970) James Britton states that a writer uses language as a means of organizing his representation of the world--a representation that constitutes his version of reality. He further explains that language serves to organize verbally the writer's conception of reality and emerges from sensory stimuli and from pre-verbal and post-verbal patterns. Moreover, Britton says that both the writer's view of reality and his verbal patterns are constantly being modified and improved through additional experiences and developing perceptions. Britton divides this developmental pattern into three categories that illustrate the functional uses of language; and in The Development of Writing Abilities, 11-18 (1975), he designates these functions as expressive, transactional, and poetic.

According to Britton, expressive language is the utterance of the

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[1] M. R. Ridley, Keats' Craftsmanship: A Study in Poetic Development (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), p. 1.

self. It stays close to the writer and is understood by those who share its content related to shared experiences, attitudes, and assumptions. As such, it reveals information not only about the topic but also about the writer. Expressive language, states Britton, is "utterance at its most relaxed and intimate, as free as possible from outside demands, whether those of task or of audience."[2] Because expressive language serves primarily as the free flow of ideas and feelings, it generally lacks structure. Keats' letters provide an example of the expressive function of language. Written primarily to relatives and friends, these letters reveal his personal thoughts on a variety of topics; and many of his sentences not only lack conventional grammatical structure but also are characterized by frequent misspellings, abbreviations, and unorthodox punctuation. At the same time, moreover, they provide insights into his philosophy and methods.

Britton discusses the transactional function of language in "The Functions of Language," a chapter included in Cooper and Odell's Research on Composing (1978). While expressive language is "free . . . from outside demands," transactional writing is primarily intended for an audience. Its purpose is to "get things done" and takes the "operative mode of informing, instructing, or persuading people or in an intellectual mode of problem solving, speculating, or theorizing."[3]

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2 James Britton et al., The Development of Writing Abilities, 11-18 (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 82.

3 James Britton, "The Functions of Writing," in Research on Composing: Points of Departure, eds., Charles L. Cooper and Lee Odell (Urbanna: NCTE, 1978), p. 4.

Transactional writing, then, involves the writer not only in clarification of purpose but also in selection of methods and stylistic techniques.

On the other hand, the poetic mode consists of writing which undertakes to create a verbal object. In discussing the poetic function of writing, Britton relies heavily upon the conclusions of Suzanne Langer, whose work in this area, Britton says, "clearly leads the field" (Language and Learning, p. 216). Britton agrees with Langer that the poetic uses of language are based on "intuitive perceptions" which form the intellectual processes by which man "represents his experiences of the world, whether in images or in words, and recognizes the representations made by himself and other people" (p. 216). This linkage of imagination, intuition, and experience with the poetic use of language is seen in Keats.

The poet believed that the imagination is a creative force that forms the basis for man's perception of reality. Images based on experience--whether active or vicarious --and on sensory stimuli are stored in the unconscious realms of the memory and later emerge spontaneously in the poet's writings. Statements from Keats' letters verify his reliance on the imagination as an intuitive source. Writing to Benjamin Bailey on November 22, 1817, Keats said:

> The simple imaginative Mind may have
> its reward in the repetition of its own silent
> working of coming continually in the spirit
> with a fine suddenness. . . .[4]

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[4] Hyder E. Rollins, ed., The Letters of John Keats, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), I, 184; hereafter referred to as Letters.

Keats also believed that reading matter may serve to supply the imagination with ideas and thus, as Britton says, "recognizes the representations made by himself and other people." In a letter to John Reynolds, written on February 19, 1818, Keats discusses the interaction among experience, imagination, and creativity. If a man reads a "certain Page of Full Poesy or distilled verse," says Keats, and lets his mind "wander with it, and bring home to it, and prophesy upon it, and dream upon it," then it provides a "voyage of conception" by which the poet may put a "girdle round the earth" (Letters I. 231). Keats synthesized his thoughts into a poetic axiom relating the source of poetic inspiration with the process of the poet in expressing his imaginative intuitions: "That if Poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all" (Letters I. 238-39). The poetic mode, then, represents the spontaneous creativity of the writer and includes not only his feelings and thoughts but also his intuitive and evaluative conceptions.

An important relationship imposed upon these three functions of writing is based on the role of the writer--whether he writes as a participant or as a spectator. The participant's role is utilized primarily in expressive and transactional writing, and action and decision are the keynotes in these functions. According to Britton, a participant's role in language embraces those functions described as "getting things done" and involves selecting and ordering material according to the "demands made by something outside ourselves, something that exists in the situation."[5] On the other hand, language as used by the spectator operates

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5 James Britton, Language and Learning (London: Penguin Press, 1970), p. 124.

on a different principle. The spectator's role involves selecting and arranging material to please the writer, not to please other people but "to enable others to share our pleasure . . . " (p. 124). As a spectator, therefore, the writer evaluates experience and attends to the total, accumulative view. As Britton states:

> . . . freedom from a participant's responsibilities allows a spectator to evaluate more broadly, to savour feelings, and to contemplate forms--the formal arrangement of feelings, of events and . . . of ideas, and the forms of the language, written or spoken, in which the whole is evaluated (p. 121).

It is apparent that Britton associates the spectator with the highest form of writing--the poetic, for he connects the spectator's role with poetry:

> As far as the written language in the role of spectator is concerned, it is appropriate to think of poetry. Poetry arises when something needs to be said, and the need is satisfied in the mere saying.
> . . . . . .
> Notice finally that this need . . . may arise from the challenge experience may present us with to evaluate, to make changes in our value systems, the organization of our feelings about things (pp. 120-121).

In addition to dividing the uses of language into expressive, transactional, and poetic modes as well as attending to the role of the writer as participant and spectator, Britton views the writing process as consisting of three states--preparation, incubation, and articulation. In "Cross Disciplinary Workshops: Theory and Practice" (1980), Randall Freishinger observes that the preparation stage consists of the writer knowing "that he must write, what he must write, and how he might proceed."[6]

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[6] Randall Freishinger, "Cross Disciplinary Workshops: Theory and Practice," College English, 42, No. 2. (1980), 161.

In other words, the writer is motivated to express an idea or thought that he has intuitively perceived. As Britton states, preparation involves the writer's desire to master his facts and the need to get his information "right with the self" or to explain "the matter to oneself." The articulation stage produces the actual writing itself and includes revision. Britton's theory describing the functions of writing, the role of the writer, and the stages of the writing process is applicable to Keats' methods and procedures.

Keats' career clearly traces his development as a conscientious writer dedicated to high poetic ideals and his progress toward reaching his goals. As a fledging poet standing on the threshold of a brilliant career, he expressed many concerns related to the creative ability of the mind to perceive reality and the necessity of the writer to impose discipline on form and structure in order to gain the control necessary to express objectively his imaginative insights. Throughout his evolution as a writer he was concerned with the relationship between the artist's mind and art. As M. H. Abrams in Natural Supernaturalism (1971) aptly summarizes, "Keats represents the growth and discipline of the artist's mind."[7]

Keats' works are mainly expressive or, as Britton says, "self directed"; and he relied on his imagination as a source of discovery and invention. In a letter to Benjamin Bailey written on November 22, 1817, Keats says:

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[7] Morris H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), p. 13.

> I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the Truth of the imagination--
> What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth--
> Whether it existed before or not (Letters I. 184).

When Keats uses the word "truth," he is referring to reality--that which is concrete and substantial in the world. He does not deny that truth or reality may be arrived at through logic or, as he states, "consequitive reasoning;" but for him, it is always perceived through imagination based on personal experience. He comments on this idea in a letter to John Taylor (January 30, 1818) in which he speaks as follows of the first draft of Endymion: "The whole thing must have appeared to you, who are a consequitive man, as a thing almost of mere words--but I assure you that when I wrote it it was a regular stepping stone of the Imagination toward a Truth" (Letters I. 219).

In a later letter Keats states that his test for an axiom is not reason but experience: "Axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proven by our pulses" (Letters I. 279). Moreover, he measures the products of the imagination by the same method: "We read fine things, but we never feel them to the full until we have gone the same steps as the Author." Britton states in Language and Learning that one's representation of reality is determined by several levels of experience and that the elemental level is derived by the senses which are "interiorized experiences of sight, sound, movement, touch, smell, and taste . . . " (p. 279). Keats' corresponding statement, "O for a Life of Sensations rather than of thoughts!" attests to his reliance on sensory experiences as a basis for perceiving reality. M. R. Ridley observes this relationship between Keats' perception of reality and the influence

of experience upon his imagination:

> To Keats the "real" world, the world that matters, is that of men and women and things, the world apprehended by the senses and the feelings, where the imagination has unfettered scope, and not the world of reason. In that world of "things" the mind finds its material; and to that world it must bring back its products for verification, since in Keats' view the mind cannot guarantee the validity of its own creation (p. 6).

Sensory stimuli, then, become an important basis for the writer's understanding of reality; but these stimuli and experiences must be filtered through the imagination. Keats' thoughts regarding the relationship between sensory stimuli and experience and between imagination and reality are similar to those proposed by Britton, who states that experience challenges us "to evaluate, to make changes in our value systems," and to "organize . . . our feelings about things" (p. 121).

One difficulty in presenting Keats as an example of Britton's theory on the functions of writing is that the poet frequently moves into all three modes in the same work. In the first place, he generally wrote in the expressive view as he included personal experiences and feelings. Next, as a poet, he wrote to "get things done" by informing and working out his perceptions; and, in articulating his views, he created a verbal work of art in each instance. In addition, Keats assumes not only the role of the participant but also that of the spectator in the majority of his poems. Since this study does not permit a full discussion of Keats' works, a major selection from the poet's beginning, middle, and final stages will be used as examples illustrating the ways Keats demonstrates Britton's theory.

"Sleep and Poetry," included in Keats' first volume, Poems (1819),

illustrates the expressive function of writing. This selection is expressive as it is written in the first person singular, contains a statement of the poet's literary program, surveys possible subjects for poetry, and explores the purposes of poetry as he sees them. In his novice stage, Keats felt humble as he envisioned the task of becoming a poet. Like many beginning authors viewing the awesome responsibilities involved in writing, Keats felt overwhelmed at the distance between his present and desired accomplishment; and in a letter to Benjamin Haydon written on May 10-11, 1819, he states: "The Cliff of Poetry Towers above me . . . " (Letters I. 141). He expresses not only his insecurity but also his deep commitment to his desired profession in the following lines:

> O Poesy! for thee I grasp my pen
> That am not yet a glorious denizen
> Of thy wide heaven; yet, to my ardent prayer,
> Yield from thy sanctuary some clear air
> . . . that I may die a death
> Of luxury, and my young spirit follow
> The morning sun-beams to the great Apollo
> Like a fresh sacrifice . . . (11. 53-61).

Moreover, he asks that he might have a period "of ten years" to "overwhelm myself in poesy" in order "to do the deed/That my own soul has to itself decreed" (11. 96-98). These thoughts expressed by Keats find parallels in Britton's expressive function of writing which reveal "as much about the speaker as it does the topic." Moreover, in considering his task, Keats sees two important stages of poetic development which he must consider. The first is one of simple enjoyment of sensual pleasures, and in the following passage he recognizes the role of the senses:

> . . . First the realm I'll pass
> Of Flora and old Pan: sleep in grass,
> Feed upon apples red, and strawberries

> And choose each pleasure that my fancy sees;
> Catch the white-handed nymph in shady places,
> To woo sweet kisses from averted faces . . . (11. 100-105).

In a later passage in the same poem Keats considers a second important stage of the poet as being responsible for more serious, humanitarian subjects:

> And can I ever bid these joys farewell?
> Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
> Where I may find the agonies, the strife
> Of human hearts . . . (11. 122-25).

The poet, then, must not only recount "beautiful sensations" but also perform consolatory functions which "soothe the cares/and lift the thoughts of man" (11. 246-47). Britton states that expressive writing is used to work out important ideas, and in "Sleep and Poetry" Keats follows this procedure by exploring the two main functions of poetry as he early conceived them.

To Britton, the expressive stage of writing is a period of exploration, of concern with personal thoughts, ideas, and feelings; but the transactional function is one of "getting things done." Britton explains this stage as one in which the writer composes largely to inform, instruct, or persuade; and he sees it as a movement toward full, explicit communication for an audience outside the writer's context. As far as a discussion of Keats is concerned, the transactional stage involves regrouping of materials, reworking of methods, and reappraising of philosophy before synthesizing all elements into a final definition. It is this extension of Britton's transactional function that will be applied to Keats' middle stage of development.

In The Stylistic Development of John Keats (1945), Walter Jackson

Bate calls this stage a period of "intensity and restraint' in which Keats' "conception of the poetical character was largely characterized."[8] This important movement in Keats' career was a necessary rite of passage in his attainment of final poetic synthesis. Building on his earlier conclusions regarding the purpose of poetry, Keats directed his attention to a consideration of the nature of the poet. He concluded that it was not enough for the poet to simply relish and enjoy the luxurious world of the senses. The poetic character also must be capable of losing its own identity in the poetic process, thus entering into a sympathetic identification with any object or person on such an intense level that the personality of the poet is annihilated and becomes an objective conduit for expressing universal concepts. Keats called this quality "negative capability" and characterized it as the "highest exertion" of poetic intensity and power.

In a letter written to Richard Woodhouse on October 17, 1818, Keats explains the nature of the poet as follows:

> As to the poetical character itself . . . it is not itself--it has no self--it is everything and nothing--it has no character--it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated--it has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen.
> . . . . . .
> A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence because he has no identity. . . . He is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's creatures (Letters I. 386-387).

Keats' working out of the concept of negative capability is an important step in his poetic development which enabled him to obtain the objective

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[8] Walter Jackson Bate, The Stylistic Development of John Keats, (New York: Humanities Press, 1958), p. 13.

distance necessary for the spectator role of the writer. It further illustrates that in writing from the third-person point of view, the author removes his subjective self in order to state universal truths.

Keats' transactional stage also involved a study of the methods of composition used by other professional models; and he experimented with techniques employed by such literary giants as Chaucer, Spenser, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and lesser writers such as minor Renaissance poets, eighteenth-century sonneteers, and Leigh Hunt. The influence of these writers upon Keats is beyond the scope of this paper, but even a cursory examination of Keatsian scholarship reveals his intense study and emulation of these models. On the whole, the young poet examined the procedures, methods, and techniques of other writers to enable him to understand the purpose and characteristics of the poet and of poetry. His use of models to clarify poetic techniques and principles indicates that this strategy can play a significant role in the composing process and has important implications for classroom use. As the writer who exerted the greatest influence on Keats' philosophy and style, Shakespeare deserves brief mention.

Keats' intense study of Shakespeare and his assimilation of ideas gained from his examination of the philosophy and methods used by the Renaissance poet played an important part in the young poet's development. In Shakespeare, Keats found a model that confirmed his idea that poetic writing should capture the essence of beauty and truth through the quality of intensity, and his articulation of the principle of intensity is based on his study of Shakespeare's language. In the spring of 1817 Keats undertook a detailed study of Shakespeare's poetic techniques; and Caroline

Spurgeon's Keats' Shakespeare (1929), which analyzes Keats markings in his copy of Shakespeare's Dramatic Works, is the acknowledged definitive work that documents the Romantic poet's examination of Shakespeare's epithets, rich imagery, and vivid descriptions and the ways he assimilated them to gain control of poetic language. Keats concluded that intensity is the major characteristic of language that enables the writer to capture meaningfully the poetic situation and that intensity is illustrated through mastery of wordcraft.

Keats also utilized Shakespeare as a model for mastering the technical aspects of verse. Scholars have pointed out close parallels between Shakespeare's sonnets and those written by Keats after the close of 1817. Before this date the Romantic poet had patterned his sonnets on the popular Petrarchan model, but after this time he followed the Shakespearean form. Bate's careful analysis reveals that Keats adopted the English pattern with its three-quatrain and couplet division, utilized Shakespeare's methods to gain unity and integrity of structure, and followed Shakespeare's devices of alliteration, assonance, antithesis, and oxymoron to gain musical felicity, contrast, and texture. (For a full discussion of Keats' emulation of Shakespeare, see Bate's analysis of Keats' later sonnets in Part II of The Stylistic Development of John Keats.)

Through the transactional function of writing Keats sought to perfect his philosophy and methods through a study of models, and he selected those writers whose works have stood the test of time. Because of Keats' deep admiration for Shakespeare and his constant experimentation with Shakespearean techniques, the great Elizabethan poet emerges as the most important model utilized by Keats. Shakespeare, however, was more a

prototype for study than for slavish imitation. In his later poetical stage, Keats reveals that his assimilation of Shakespearean patterns underwent transitions and transformations that resulted in an independent and unique artistry. As Keats illustrates, a beginning writer can learn much through a study of models, but he must ultimately synthesize the teachings gained from his study and express these conceptions in his own individual manner.

Britton says less about the transactional function of writing than he does about the expressive and poetic. Moreover, he indicates that writing functions move in an either-or direction: from expressive to transactional or from transactional to poetic. Keats, however, generally illustrates a three-step process from expressive to transactional and then to poetic. A study of Keats' methods indicates that a writer may undergo a period of reorganization and transformation before he moves into a period of synthesis. It is probable that further research is needed in this area and that the transactional stage may well be expanded to include a period of transition from the expressive to the poetic mode.

In the poetic stage Britton sees the writer as having moved from an expressive participant role into an evaluative creative or spectator role. As he states in Language and Learning, there is a fundamental difference in the position of the writer in these two roles:

> In participant activity it is the construction we place the new--the current encounter with actuality--that we attend to: as spectators, it is essentially the total--the accumulated view of the world that makes us the sort of people we are. . . . Thus, though we have assigned a function, a use, to the language of spectatorship, it is a use which is clearly distinguishable from that of the participant. 'Language to get things done' remains intact as a criterion for one role, and the

> language of being and becoming roughly describes the other (p. 124).

To paraphrase Britton, the poetic mode refers to writing which aims principally to create a verbal object. Language is used for artistic purposes and involves a "formal arrangement of feelings and events and ideas . . . in which the whole is expressed" (p. 121). In other words, the poetic mode reveals the accumulated ideas, feelings, and thoughts which the writer has considered and pondered. As such, it ultimately states the writer's response to and evaluation of his experiences. In the poetic mode the writer is "free from the participant's responsibilities . . . and operates on a different principle which permits him to arrange material to please himself and to enable others to share his pleasure" (p. 124). Keats' movement into the poetic mode is illustrated in his odes. Their tone and content reveal the objective stance of the spectator, and their structure indicates the genuine originality that is the hallmark of the poetic function of verse.

Keats' odes express ideas that represent a synthesis of his poetic philosophy. In the "Ode to a Grecian Urn," for example, Keats states that art, when intensely captured, offers an escape from reality and a transcendental union with truth and beauty. Truth and beauty, concludes Keats, are one and the same: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." Through art, man may "burst his mortal bounds" and thus attain immortality. Poetry, then, by granting this vision not only captures beautiful sensations that provide pleasure but also performs a consolatory function and ultimately becomes "a friend to man." Keats, therefore, assumes the spectator's role in objectively describing the scene depicted on the urn

and in evaluating its meaning. The sculptured urn, he says, is the symbol of the permanence of art and the impermanence of the artist; therefore, it is a "Cold Pastoral" whose chief function is to "tease us out of thought/ As doth eternity" (ll. 44-45). Keats' urn "teases" man into contemplation of universal themes--of transient human endeavor and inevitable mutability, of impermanence and permanence, of mortality and immortality.

In the odes Keats created a new poetic form. Until their composition, the young poet had employed conventional metrical and stanzaic forms; and the primary mode he used was the sonnet. In composing sixty-four sonnets--43 percent of his total of 150 poems--Keats had generally followed the two established sonnet forms. As he mastered his craft and synthesized his poetic concepts, he became dissatisfied with existing sonnet forms and announced his intent to create a new one. In his extended journal letter to George and Georgiana Keats written from February to May, 1819, Keats said:

> I have been endeavouring to discover a better sonnet stanza than we have. The legitimate [Petrarchan] does not suit the language over-well from the pouncing rhymes--the other kind [the Shakespearean] appears too elegiac--and the couplet at the end seldom has a pleasing effect . . . (Letters II. 108).

It is generally conceded that Keats' ode stanza results from his blending of the Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet stanza forms. Except for minor variations in "To Autumn," all of Keats' great odes contain a Shakespearean quatrain and a Petrarchan sestet. In rearranging his materials, Keats illustrates the poetic function of writing which, as Britton says, "permits the writer to please himself" and to "contemplate . . . the forms of language. . . ."

In addition to exemplifying the expressive, transactional, and poetic functions of writing, Keats follows Britton's three stages of the writing process-- preparation, incubation, and articulation; and his sonnets "On the Sea" and "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" illustrate this procedure. In these two poems Keats adopts the spectator's role in which he recounts the stage of discovery and the need of the writer to express his ideas. As Britton states in Language and Learning, "Poetry arises when something needs to be said, and the need is satisfied in the saying" (p. 120).

Prior to composing "On the Sea" Keats went to the Isle of Wight for quiet and study. He subsequently wrote to John Hamilton Reynolds on April 17, 1817, that a passage in King Lear inspired him to write this sonnet. Keats writes: "I have been rather narvus [nervous]--and the passage in Lear--'Do you not hear the sea?' has haunted me intensely" (Letters I. 133). After including the sonnet in the letter, Keats states:

> I find I cannot live without poetry--
> without eternal poetry--half the day will
> not do--the whole of it--I began with a
> little--I had become all a tremble from
> not having written anything of late--the
> sonnet . . . did me some good. I slept
> the better last night for it. . . . "

This passage not only shows Keats' need to express himself but also illustrates the preparatory and incubational processes involved in the composition of the sonnet. Moreover, it reveals that a writer may fasten upon a single line or phrase that he has read and develop an idea that inspires a new conception of the material. Keats' reading of King Lear provided him with a germ of conception through which he rose above the shores of Shanklin Cliffs to contemplate the eternal, universal sea whispering

around life's shores. In like manner may be traced the composition of the sonnet, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer."

In "The Functions of Writing" Britton speculates that "in much poetic writing incubation also does duty for the earlier stage, preparation" (p. 23). In further describing the preparatory process, Britton states that the writer's "inner voice" dictates "written forms of discourse . . . that . . . relate to a subject's reading patterns over a period of time as well as to the subject's drafting procedures" (pp. 27-28). Scholarly criticism has vindicated Britton's speculations by documenting a close relationship between Keats' Chapman's Homer sonnet and his reading materials.

Keats' period of preparation and incubation in composing this sonnet may be traced directly to his reading of Chapman's translation of Homer during an evening he spent with his former schoolmaster and friend, Charles Cowden Clarke. They parted, said Clarke, "at day-spring, yet he contrived that I should receive the poem from a distance of, maybe, two miles by ten o'clock."[9] Keats, then, not only walked home over a distance of two miles but also wrote, revised, and had the poem delivered to Clarke within a period of four hours.

The influence of Keats' readings on the preparation and incubation of this sonnet has been further verified in scholarly studies. Clarke's reminiscences include a listing of books in the library of Enfield Academy, which Keats attended--"abridgements of all the voyages and

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9 Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke, "Recollections of John Keats" in Recollections of Writers, introd. Robert Gittings (Fontwell, Surrey: Centaur Press Ltd., 1969), p. 130.

travels of any note" and Robertson's History of America (p. 124). An account by Keats' schoolmate Edward Holmes includes "Robinson Crusoe and something about Montezuma and the Incas of Peru."[10] The poet's "Watcher of the Skies," who sees "a new planet swim into his keen," has been traced to Bonnycastle's description in Introduction to Astronomy as Herschel's discovery of the new planet Uranus. Thus, in these two sonnets, Keats illustrates Britton's process of preparation, incubation, and articulation.

One of the clearest descriptions of Keats' methods of work is given by his friend Richard Woodhouse:

> These lines give some insight into Keat's modes of writing Poetry. He has repeatedly said in conversation that he never sits down to write, unless he is full of ideas, and then thoughts come about him in troops, as tho' soliciting to be accepted and he selects--one of his maxims is that if Poetry does not come naturally it had better not come at all. [This account may be related to Britton's stage of preparation.] The moment he feels any dearth he discontinues writing and waits for a happier moment. [Note the similarity to the expressive mode.] He is generally more troubled by a redundancy than by a poverty of images, and he culls what appears to him at the time the best. He never corrects, unless perhaps a word here or there should occur to him as preferable to an expression he has already used. [Note parallels with Britton's process of articulation in which writing is shaped at the point of utterance.]
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> . . . . . .
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> He has said that he has often not been aware of the beauty of some thought or expression until after he had composed and written it down--It has then struck him with astonishment and seemed rather the production of another person than his own--He has wondered how he came to hit upon it. This was the case with the description of Apollo in the 3rd book of Hyperion 79 etc. . . . It seemed to come by chance or magic--to be as it were something given

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10 Walter Jackson Bate, John Keats (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 58.

to him.[11]

Woodhouse's last statements aptly describe what Britton calls "the mystery of conception" in which "thinking and utterance may undergo organizing processes at an involuntary level" ("Functions of Writing," p. 23). Moreover, as Britton further points out, during the process of articulation the writer "develops an inner voice capable of dictating to him or her in the forms of the written language" (p. 24). Numerous other documentations of Keats' method have been provided by Keatisian scholars. For example, a study of Keats' revision of the first draft of "The Eve of St. Agnes" provides important insights in this area. A more detailed study of his works not included here presents further illumination revealing Keats' writing processes within Britton's paradigm.

In the final analysis, Keats serves as a verifying example of a writer who composed in the expressive, transactional, and poetic modes. In the expressive function he relied on his feelings, thoughts, and perceptions of reality based on his imaginative and intuitive perceptions; and he utilized sensory stimuli and experiences to verify his conceptions. In the transactional function he wrote "to get things done," which involved a mastery of craft and a clearer conception of his philosophy and aims. To attain these goals, he studied and emulated structures and techniques used by masters of poetic language; and he continually probed the meaning of his experiences to obtain a clearer definition of reality. In the poetic function of writing Keats achieved a mastery

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[11] Amy Lowell, John Keats, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1925), pp. 501-502

of form seen in the creation of his ode structure, and his command of language is illustrated in the condensation and thick massing of imagery that illustrate the principle of intensity. In perfecting his poetic language, Keats reaches a level that Bate describes as "a high plateau where in mastery of phrase he has few equals in English poetry, and only one obvious superior (Shakespeare)."[12] Within the poetic function Keats also states his philosophical principles, one of which equates beauty with truth--philosophical statements that represent his mature thinking on the nature of life. Within these functions of writing the poet moved from the participant to the spectator role and achieved an enduring reputation as the objective spectator who presents provocative insights into the nature of life. In brief, statements in Keats' letters, examination of his works, and analyses in scholarly studies show that his writing procedures clearly parallel Britton's steps of preparation, incubation, and articulation. Keats, then, emerges as a convincing model who verifies Britton's philosophy and research on the functions and processes of writing.

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12 Walter Jackson Bate, "Keat's Style: Evolution Toward a Permanent Value," in English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism, 2nd ed., ed. M.H. Abrams (London: Oxford University Press, 1975; reprint ed.) p. 416.